

VZCZCXRO2335
PP RUEHTRO
DE RUEHAS #1695/01 3251128
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211128Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4894
INFO RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0308
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1361
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6108
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2416
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2024
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6883
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 8690
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3135
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001695

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM AG

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTIES CITE PROBLEMS WITH ELECTION
PROCESS

REF: A. ALGIERS 1662
1B. ALGIERS 1344
1C. ALGIERS 1629
1D. ALGIERS 1658

Classified By: Classified by Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton
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reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The campaign process for the November 29 local elections is in full swing, but the process is not fully transparent. In a series of meetings November 7-14, we met to discuss the election process with representatives of major coalition and opposition political parties, including the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), National Liberation Front (FLN), Society of Peace Movement (MSP), Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), and National Democratic Rally (RND). Conversations with party representatives lead us to believe that the outcome will be based heavily on government manipulation of candidate lists. END SUMMARY.

THE VIEW FROM RCD

12. (C) Mohamed Khandak, RCD local elections campaign director, told us in a November 7 meeting that every election in Algeria has elements of fraud, opining that the fraud makes the elected official responsive to the individuals who put them in positions of authority, rather than to the voters. According to Khandak, the fraud that will occur in the November 29 elections is part of a deliberate effort to install a cadre who will support a third term for President Bouteflika (refs C and D). Khandak added that similar efforts are underway at the level of the senate. Further, he claimed that interior ministry efforts were afoot to create problems for opposition parties, including RCD, in order to restrict them geographically to the northern center of the country. Khandak provided several examples, both orally and in writing, of perceived election-related irregularities. Among them:

-- The interior ministry, while conducting the process to determine the display and presentation of party posters and bulletins, used the results of the last three legislative elections to determine the order for the political parties. RCD maintains that this ensures that the ruling coalition parties (FLN, RND, MSP) are featured first. Khandak said that this was in violation of voting rules and went against the practices of previous elections.

-- In Berriane, the head of the local list was prevented from running. Even though he participated as a candidate in the May 17 legislative election, the interior ministry said that he was a danger to society.

-- A candidate in Ghardaia was arrested by Information and Security Service personnel (DRS) and held at the Ouargla detention center, then later transferred to the Ben Aknoune detention center in Algiers. He was asked to sign a document saying that he would not reveal where he was detained.

-- In Djelfa, one proposed candidate was rejected as being dead. After an investigation, it was shown that the candidate has the same name as his grandfather, who died in 1991. Despite an appeal, the judge decided that the government was right to reject the candidate.

THE VIEW FROM MSP

13. (C) In a November 12 meeting, MSP representatives Naamane Laouar, in charge of the local elections committee, and Abdelkrim Dahmane, in charge of external affairs and Algerian expatriates, expressed considerable doubt about the transparency of the November 29 local elections, pointing specifically to the absence of an election monitoring commission (ref A). According to Laouar and Dahmane, the government refuses to have an election commission because it says that it cannot afford one. MSP rejects that position, they said, adding that for the past two years MSP has called for the establishment of an unpaid election commission.

(Note: Members of previous election commissions have been

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compensated. The interior ministry asserted that prospective members of a commission this year demanded too much money. End note.) By removing a financial incentive, they maintained, the commission can remain independent. Laouar and Dahmane called for changes to the country's electoral laws to make the election process more free and said that the outcome of elections is determined by the actions of the interior ministry. Dahmane noted that in spite of MSP's participation in the government's ruling coalition, the party voices criticisms of the election process and is working within the country's political system to bring about change. They cited two examples of problems with the election process:

-- A former MSP senator's name was rejected from a local slate because he was determined to be a "threat to public order" even though he had served in the national senate.

-- The interior ministry maintains a file on individuals, referred to as "Police Record #3," which contains confidential information, including behavioral information,

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not accessible to the public. If a proposed candidate has "negative" information in Record #3, then that individual is barred from candidacy. There is no independent body that can verify the validity of the interior ministry's decisions, they noted. Moreover, the interior ministry, Laouar and Dahmane said, often acts on false information.

THE VIEW FROM FFS

14. (C) Local elections coordinator for FFS and party First Secretary Karim Tabbou told us in a November 14 meeting that

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politics in Algeria has been discredited. Tabbou opined that there is a disconnect between Algerians and their government, as evidenced by issues concerning the prices of oil and potatoes (ref B). As a result, it was very difficult to get Algerians to vote. Addressing FFS difficulties with the

November 2007 election process, Tabbou said the interior ministry had rejected eight of the party's lists for political reasons. He added that the party had been prevented from presenting several other lists, but because the lists had not been officially rejected the party was unable to make any official appeals. Below are four specific examples cited by FFS as challenges the party has faced in the November 2007 election process:

-- In Chlef, FFS representatives were prevented from presenting a list of candidates, despite arriving 20 minutes before the midnight deadline.

-- The accreditation of a party representative was contested because it was signed by former party first secretary Ali Laskri and not the current first secretary Karim Tabbou.

-- In Setif, a list of candidates was rejected after verification and registration, with no explanation given. When an FFS representative lodged a protest, he was expelled by force.

-- In El Oued, security guards pressured FFS candidates to withdraw their candidacies.

BUT ALL IS WELL FOR THE FLN AND THE RND

¶ 15. (C) While the RCD, MSP and FFS are unhappy with aspects of the election process, the FLN and RND seem less concerned. In a November 13 meeting, FLN campaign director Frikha Amara had no negative stories to recount concerning the election process. He said that 800 FLN candidates had been rejected, of which 200 had been successfully reinstated. He did not comment on the remaining 600. Addressing the absence of an independent election monitoring commission, Amara countered that party representatives would be at each polling station and they could insure the transparency of the process. He also noted that the international media would be present to monitor the events.

¶ 16. (C) Miloud Chorfi, RND campaign director, was similarly complacent about the functioning of the election process. In a November 14 meeting, Chorfi recounted his party's successes over the years and expressed no opinion on the absence of an

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independent election monitoring commission.

COMMENT

¶ 17. (C) The process leading up to the November 29 local elections in Algeria, while not a total sham, is not a model to be copied. From what we have reported and seen, we have serious concerns about the transparency of the process and the ability of political parties to function freely. Interestingly, MSP's Dahmane told us that he had been an election observer in Mauritania, as part of a National Democratic Institute (NDI) program. He said that he found the election process there to be far cleaner and more credible than Algeria's, even with Mauritania's troubled history.

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